

Minutes of the Regional Planning Commission
Tuesday, June 16, 2009, 4:00 p.m.
Lake County Department of Transportation, Libertyville, IL

2.2

The Regional Planning Commission met with the following in attendance:

Members Present:

Marvin Raymond – Chair
Charles J. Lucas – Vice Chair
Craig Ellison
Lawrence Falbe
Paul Geiselhart
William Holleman
Donald Klein
Marie Lyons
Jordan Madorsky
Lorraine Ray
Bryan Rouse
Terry L. Weppler
Charles Williams

Planning Staff:

Megan Krueger
Bill Hunt
David Husemoller

Ex-Officios:

Philip Rovang

Others:

Cheryl Pytlarz – U of I Extension Office
Andrew Blaul – Lake County Farm Bureau
Patty Werner – Stormwater Management Commission
James Reaves – Director, U of I Extension Office
Rory Klick – College of Lake County

1.0 CALL TO ORDER - meeting began at 4:08 p.m.

There were not enough members present to constitute a quorum; therefore, the meeting was unofficial and only for information purposes.

2.0 APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

- 2.1 The minutes could not be approved due to the lack of a quorum. Suggestions were made for corrections for the next meeting. Chairman Raymond requested that his comments regarding bee keeping be added to the minutes as this is an agricultural use. Commissioner Holleman asked that the entire date be added to the second paragraph on the third page.

3.0 ADDED TO AGENDA ITEMS - None

4.0 PUBLIC COMMENTS - None

5.0 CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS - None

6.0 PLAN REVIEWS AND HEARINGS - None

7.0 OLD BUSINESS

- 7.1 Guest Speaker on Sustainable Agriculture in Lake County
Mr. Greg Koeppen - Lake County Farm Bureau

Chairman Raymond turned the meeting over to Mr. David Husemoller to introduce the guest speakers.

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Mr. David Husemoller reminded the Commission that their goal is to review sustainable agriculture in Lake County; what programs are currently available and what the County can do to promote this initiative. Mr. Husemoller introduced Mr. Andrew Blaul, the Information Director for the Lake County Farm Bureau. He explained that Mr. Blaul, as well as the other individuals asked to address the Commission this afternoon, are already involved in promoting sustainable agriculture and assisting the farmers in Lake County.

Commissioner Holleman requested that Mr. Blaul explain the purpose of the Farm Bureau to the Commission members.

Mr. Blaul explained that the Farm Bureau is a member-based organization, with approximately 13, 000 members. The Lake County Farm Bureau is a member of the Illinois Farm Bureau, which is in turn, a subsidiary of the American Farm Bureau Federation. The main responsibilities of the Farm Bureau are to promote agriculture and to provide education about agriculture to the residents of the County. The Bureau provides a unified voice for farmers in the County, in the state and across the country to protect their interests.

Mr. Blaul reviewed some of the programs that were offered by the Farm Bureau that pertain to sustainable agriculture within the County. The Agriculture in the Classroom program is a free program with which they educate local school children regarding agriculture. The Bureau offers a grant program that provides grants to schools for agricultural education. Many schools use these grants to begin school gardens for which the children are responsible. They plant, tend, and harvest the gardens while in the classroom, and several use the vegetables that the gardens yield for the school lunch programs. Any surplus is donated to local food pantries. Woodland Elementary school has participated in this program for several years. It is the largest and most successful school garden program in the County; last year Woodland donated over 800 pounds of produce to local food pantries.

Mr. Blaul added that in addition to the garden grants, the Bureau makes school presentations to educate children on where and how food is produced. The Bureau also promotes all farmers' markets within the County on their website and in their publications. The farmer's markets are the first source of locally grown food, and an important part of the initiative currently under discussion.

Commissioner Weppeler entered the meeting at 4:16 p.m.

Chairman Raymond officially called the meeting to order with at quorum at 4:16 p.m.

Mr. Blaul stated that the Farm Bureau has also been involved with the Lake County Heritage Farm Foundation to promote the heritage of farming in Lake County.

Mr. Blaul stated that although he does not know the percentage of land still being farmed in Lake County, it is approximately 34,000 acres.

Mr. Husemoller added that it is approximately eleven percent of the land within Lake County.

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Commissioner Holleman asked if someone could provide a definition of sustainable agriculture for the Commission members.

Chairman Raymond stated that he was frustrated after leaving last month's meeting because he felt that the topic was not well defined and would be difficult to narrow the topic to a workable goal and provide direction.

Commissioner Holleman stated that he feels the topic is too broad and the meaning of Sustainable Agriculture is different for every individual.

Mr. Husemoller suggested that the Commission retain their individual ideas of the definition until a time when all of the speakers have had an opportunity to address the group. Further discussion may allow for a consensus among the members.

Ms. Cheryl Pytlarz stated that the definition of sustainable agriculture should be defined by the Commission and this definition formulated could be a starting point for their work on this project.

Patty Werner from the Stormwater Management Commission stated that she too feels the topic is very broad, and she believes that there is no statewide adopted definition of sustainable agriculture. She asked Mr. Blaul if the Farm Bureau held the statistics of different types of farming practices on the farming acres within Lake County

Mr. Blaul stated that the Farm Bureau does not keep those statistics but that they would be available through the Census of Agriculture. The most recent census was published approximately six months ago.

Mr. Blaul stated that the Farm Bureau would be pleased to assist the RPC in any way possible with the sustainable agriculture initiative.

7.2 Guest Speaker on Sustainable Agriculture in Lake County
Ms. Cheryl Pytlarz - University of Illinois Extension Office

Mr. Husemoller introduced the next two speakers from the University of Illinois Extension Office; Mr. James Reaves and Ms. Cheryl Pytlarz.

Ms. Pytlarz, the Urban Food Ambassador for the U of I Extension Office, explained that she would be providing the presentation. She distributed the Extension Office's Annual Report to the Commission members.

Ms. Pytlarz explained that the Extension Office is part of a national network of land grant universities that was established in the 1930s. During this era, it was determined that the soils in the United States were depleted and the USDA founded a university in each state to conduct agricultural research in order to save the soils and agriculture as a whole. The University of Illinois is the land grant institution for Illinois. The extension office works collectively with all the land grant institutions in the United States.

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Ms. Pytlarz went on to state that there are several U of I Extension offices throughout the state. Each office focuses on core services based on the needs of the community. The Lake County Extension Office features 4H youth development, agriculture and horticulture education programs, technical resources, nutrition education, and community and economic development.

Ms. Pytlarz continued to explain that the Extension is involved in urban agriculture, which is the direction agriculture is going in Lake County as the agricultural lands continue to be developed. The Extension organizes a local food festival which takes place annually on the first Sunday in October called the Edible Harvest Festival at Prairie Crossing Farm. Food is prepared and available for the public to sample and purchase. Contacts are provided so that the public can continue to make purchases directly from the farmers year round.

Ms. Pytlarz discussed other urban programs currently in operation in Lake County, including: UR FARM (Urban Resources for Food and Revitalization Management) and Green Town Waukegan. UR FARM is a program incorporating hands-on agricultural training using authentic practices. A ten-acre farm in Gurnee is being used for this program; this is truly an urban farm and is surrounded by commercial properties and homes. Five individuals have been hired to run the farm from the villages of North Chicago and Waukegan. These individuals receive a living allowance through the VISTA program or AmeriCorps which is a division of the Peace Corps. The food will be harvested and returned to the residents of Waukegan and North Chicago so that these families have access to fresh fruits and vegetables. Urban farming is slightly different from very rural areas in that the same pesticides and herbicides cannot be used due to the risk of human exposure.

Green Town Waukegan is an effort to clean up vacant lots and buildings and revitalize them for green collar use and local food production. The unemployed and underemployed are being recruited to establish and grow community gardens, urban farms, composting facilities, and eventually native restoration of the ravines within the area that have become dumping areas.

Ms. Pytlarz reported that the Extension is also very involved with servicing the equine community within Lake County as the county has more horses than most counties in the country. The Illinois Manure Share program is an on-line service started by Ellen Phillips, in conjunction with the Extension, which allows horse owners to register to sell their manure, and business to register to purchase manure. The service has not been in existence for very long, but already seems very successful. Additionally, the Illinois and Wisconsin Extensions will be conducting bi-state horse workshops that educate horse owners in manure composting practices.

Ms. Pytlarz stated that extensions all over the state are developing urban farm and local food system programs. The demand for local food in Lake County exceeds the supply. The land values in Lake County are so high, that even the profits from locally grown, organic, produce are not sufficient. The County can work with the state to establish further tax advantages and incentives for local farmers.

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There are many training programs for individuals interested in learning techniques for farming, as well as, suppliers that allow the affordable rental of farming equipment by the hour. The problem remains that the land is not affordable, and therefore prohibits the land from being farmed, and the land is then being sold for development.

Commissioner Falbe asked Ms. Pytlarz if she was aware of a Green Jobs fair in Waukegan later in the week.

Ms. Pytlarz stated that North Chicago and the City of Waukegan are both involved in the Green Jobs initiative, which is part of the Green Town program. She stated that Mr. Reaves will be present at this event.

Commissioner Holleman stated that he was not clear on Ms. Pytlarz comments regarding agricultural taxes.

Ms. Pytlarz explained that her comments were regarding sales tax for land. She went on to say that when a conservation easement is placed on a property the land resale value goes down because there are limitations on the use of the property. When the property is sold, there is a tax assessment or rebate due to the decrease in value of the land because of the easement. Easements can be placed on a property for variety of reasons; conservation of a historic structure; conservation of water resources; or a vista with a wonderful view. An easement must be justifiable for it to be accepted. The tax rebate still does not offset the decrease in the value of the property, but it can assist the individual who has a passion for farming. Situations such as these are where governance can help address the issues regarding land value for the purpose of sustainable agriculture.

Ms. Patty Werner from the Stormwater Management Commission stated that conservation easements are economically sound when property is transferred through a family and the heirs cannot afford to pay the taxes associated with the gift. The property owner can apply for the conservation easement while still maintaining it as a farm. When sold, the property can be sold as a farm rather than developable property.

Mr. Philip Rovang stated that there were two topics on which the Commission needed information from the speakers. The Commission wants to identify the needs of the farmer and the possible role for the County in the sustainable agriculture initiative. The report that the Commission must return to the PB&Z Committee must identify what the County can or should do to become involved in local food production and sustainable farming.

In reply, Ms. Pytlarz pointed out that the handout from the Extension has a link to the USDA's website. The USDA does have a sustainable ag definition on its website, but it is not a Congressional definition; that is, it is not a term that is recognized by Congress such as the definition of organic.

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Mr. Reaves stated that he believes the University of Illinois has a definition for sustainable agriculture. The representatives from the Extension Office will find the definition and forward the information to the Commission.

Mr. Rovang stated that sustainable agriculture is not the only issue for consideration. The Commission should focus on the broader terms of local food production for local consumption. This is not just organic farming, but all forms of local food production, and can include animal products.

Commissioner Lyons stated that Ms. Pytlarz was able to provide initial direction to the Commission with regard to sustainable agriculture, as well as, some of the problems currently facing local farmers.

Chairman Raymond asked if there was a collective listing of all of the organizations that are involved in sustainable agriculture. He stated that the production of a directory for this purpose might be a direction the Commission should take.

Mr. Husemoller stated that there are meetings taking place at the national and state levels regarding local food production and sustainable practices. One aspect of this is the Woodland school children growing gardens and feeding themselves. This is a sustainable because they are feeding themselves and not relying on the transportation of food from thousands of miles away. Sustainability also encompasses renewal and reuse without the depletion of the soil and other natural resources. He reminded the Commissioners that these meetings are the starting point for defining local food production; the idea is to expand the list resources and develop a network for farmers and the public.

Ms. Rory Klick, Curriculum Director for the Horticulture Program for the College of Lake County stated that the department has recently rewritten the curriculum for horticultural production to focus on sustainable and organic growing practices, which is the current trend in farming. The college has also established thirty-two local community gardens. The program brings together people from the community, staff, faculty, and students in order to learn how to create their own food production. The program hopes to donate two thousand pounds of food this year to local women's shelters.

Mr. Rovang stated that the new President of the College of Lake County, Dr. Girard Weber, is very interested in going green, preserving natural resources and the environmental in general. He stated that this is just the beginning of the plans for the College and the County, and he looks forward to the potential partnership with CLC with regard to this initiative.

Commissioner Holleman asked where meat and dairy production come into play with regard to the topic of sustainable agriculture.

Ms. Pytlarz stated that in an urban environment this type of farming would not be tolerated due to the noise and smell from the animals. Sustainable urban agriculture is usually limited to vegetables and certain grains.

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Commissioner Ellison stated that he visited a mushroom farm west of Lake Geneva, Wisconsin and picked up a publication entitled The Farm Fresh Atlas of Southeastern Wisconsin. He explained that the directory lists farms in Wisconsin by location and key produce. This type of publication would be very helpful for promoting sustainable agriculture.

Ms. Pytlarz stated this type of directory also allows for direct sales eliminating the middle man in the process; this increases the profits for the farmers, and lowers the costs for the consumers.

Ms. Klick stated that agriculture and horticulture are no longer discussed within the school systems as viable career options. In order for youth to perceive something as a worth-while career there has to be a market for the job. The job potential has to be conveyed. She plans to speak at the high schools within Lake County this fall to discuss the need for farmers, and how to make it a necessary and beneficial pursuit.

Commissioner Falbe asked what type of information the Commission should return to the PB&Z Committee.

Mr. Husemoller stated that he could not answer that question because that was what the RPC had to decide.

Mr. James Reaves, Director of the University of Illinois Extension Office explained that some other counties employ an Agriculture Agent, which is a resource Lake County does not currently have. An Ag Agent would function as a "farm director" for the County. An agent knows whom to call for special resources or information based on each farmer's skills or knowledge base. Without the Ag Agent, the Extension has to hire specialists from other counties, but a local agent could recommend an expert within their own county. Mr. Reeves requested that the Commission Members talk to their district representatives to inform them of the importance of the Extension within the County and the agricultural needs for the County in general. He has recently learned that there is a great budget deficit for the Extension, and if the County does not support the Extension, the University may no longer fund this agency. If the County supported the hiring of an Ag Agent, the Extension would complete the hiring.

Ms. Klick stated that she previously worked for the Wisconsin extension services where Rose Skora was also employed. Ms. Skora is one of the individuals behind the publication of The Farm Fresh Atlas of Southeastern Wisconsin. Ms. Klick explained that the reason for the success of the Southeastern Wisconsin counties is partially due to their having an Ag Agent who is available to the farmers, and who coordinates their activities and needs. The lack of an Ag Agent in Lake County is a huge deficit.

Mr. Rovang asked if the Master Gardener program would have a role in assisting a small crop farmer.

Mr. Reaves stated that Master Gardener program does not deal with farming but with small gardens.

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Chairman Raymond explained that there is history behind sustainability. He currently lives in a home that was built by the government during the depression. The homes were small family homes on ten-acre lots that were designed for sustainability for individual families. Jobs were created for the individuals constructing the homes, and each family had enough land to grow their own gardens and grains, and raise cattle and chickens. He said that the role of agriculture has to be re-invented.

Commissioner Holleman stated that the expense for fresh food keeps the process from becoming productive. The cost is out of the range of affordability for most families. He went on to say that he attended one of the most successful Farmers' Markets in the state of California. Families traveled from over fifty miles away to make their purchases, and the market had more than 100 organic farmers selling their products. He would like these markets to be as successful in Lake County.

Commissioner Ellison stated that the Commission should recommend that the County fund an Ag Agent for Lake County. He asked if Mr. Reaves would be able to provide a job description and source of funding for a person with these responsibilities.

Commissioner Holleman stated that he was a former member of the Heritage Farm Foundation, which is not really in business any longer. He explained that the County was behind the production of the project, but that when the process was underway the County would not provide any funding. He feels that the sustainable agriculture initiative will end with the same result.

Chairman Raymond stated that he was not sure that Lake County is large enough to support its own Ag Agent. He suggested that consideration be given to sharing the Ag Agent between multiple counties. He stated that this suggestion might determine the actual degree of interest from the county.

Mr. Reaves stated that he will provide information to the Commission regarding the responsibilities and salary for an Ag Agent in Lake County.

8.0 NEW BUSINESS - None

9.0 OTHER BUSINESS

9.1 Chairman's Report - None

9.2 Commissioners' Comments

Commissioner Holleman stated that he attended the CMAP presentation on the Go To 2040 plan and he felt that it was a waste of time.

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Mr. Rovang explained that there will be several more such presentation where CMAP will continue to gather suggestions from the residents.

9.3 Director's Report

Mr. Rovang stated that the Commission members could view the New Central Permit facility to the north of the present meeting room. The new facility is where the Commission will meet in the future. Construction has fallen a couple of months behind, but the move to the new facility is planned for early spring 2010.

He went on to say that the department is currently working with a consultant to create a seamless permitting process. The Stormwater Management Commission, Planning, Building and Development, Division of Transportation, Environmental Health, and Public Works are all working together in this process to better serve the customers.

Mr. Rovang also stated that the 2010 Budget has been submitted and is under initial review. Estimated revenues for FY09 are down 50% over last year, and that is a 40% decrease from the previous year. The decrease in revenue can be attributed to a drop in activity level, which is a direct result of the economy, and also to the type of permits that are being requested. The department is receiving requests for garages and sheds rather than for multi-million dollar homes that generate the larger revenues.

David Husemoller stated that the Liberty Prairie Conservancy has organized a group of sixteen different conservation organizations from within Lake County to review the goals for open space. The Open Space Visioning Group met in March and May to formalize its recommendation on the percentage of land that should be permanently protected in Lake County.

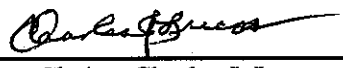
9.4 Ex-Officio Reports – None

10.0 ADJOURNMENT

Motion: To adjourn the June 16, 2009, RPC Meeting at 6:01 p.m.
Made by: Commissioner Lyons
Seconded by: Commissioner Weppler
Action: Approved unanimously



Regional Planning Commission – Chair
Marvin J. Raymond



Vice Chair – Charles J. Lucas

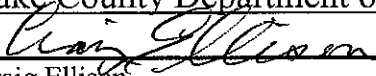
Marie C. Lyons

Jordan Madersky

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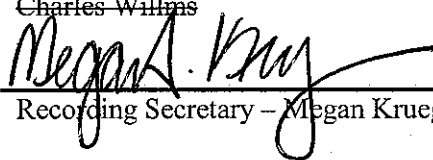
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Recording Secretary – Megan Krueger